



SAM FOX SCHOOL OF DESIGN  
& VISUAL ARTS

MFA09

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# A NEW PARADIGM

# MFA09

It is with great pleasure that I present this publication of the 2009 graduating students of the MFA program at Washington University's Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts.

This being the first class I have followed through to graduation as dean of the Sam Fox School, I have personally witnessed their tremendous development and artistic growth. They are an inspiring, adventurous, and energetic group, forging a path into fresh terrain under the mentorship of our faculty and the leadership of graduate director Patricia Olynyk, who joined the School from the University of Michigan in the summer of 2007, at the same time these graduating students arrived on campus.

Whether addressing pressing issues that cross between their studio and creative work into public and social spheres, or responding to the exigencies that drive the larger comprehensive culture, the students in the Graduate School of Art embrace a variety of innovative practices where the boundaries between art and life are becoming increasingly blurred.

The work produced in this two-year, critically engaged studio program represents tremendous diversity with regard to exploration of ideas, use of materials, methods of production, and strategies of dissemination. Their art is evidence of an intense journey, and is not without risk. The results are at once tantalizing, poetic, satirical, puzzling, and often profound.

This catalog, published in conjunction with the MFA 2009 exhibition at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, is the first of its kind to be produced as a joint effort between the Graduate School of Art and the Kemper Art Museum. It celebrates the Sam Fox School's diversity and showcases the lives and exhilarating achievements of twenty-seven graduating MFA artists—as individuals and as members of a dynamic and engaged community. I am proud of this group of graduates and have been inspired by their fearlessness and visual curiosity.

**Carmon Colangelo**

*Dean, Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts  
E. Desmond Lee Professor for  
Collaboration in the Arts*



# EVOLVING PRACTICES

# MFA09

We live in an age that represents enormous richness in terms of diversity of perspectives and both overlapping and contrasting interests. Art critic and philosopher Arthur C. Danto states that “contemporary art has become wholly pluralistic, even chaotic—with one medium as good as another.” “Work that bridges the gap between art and life,” he adds, “is now the definitive art of our time.”<sup>1</sup>

This assertion fittingly captures the spirit of the graduate program in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, where students balance skill-based training with rigorous inquiry into the evolution of their ideas. Though their work does not collapse easily into any single category, certain recurring themes and approaches to art-making surface with regularity, and suggest that our students are not only eager to explore multiple mediums, but are deeply committed to investigating ideas and methodologies beyond their studios.

The range of issues that confront today’s artists also challenge our artists-in-training. Though there are divergent voices in the discussion regarding what constitutes successful art training, technology and globalization are undeniably impacting art education at a rapid pace. Concurrently, the accelerated growth and expansion of the art world and its various markets are transforming the larger realm of cultural production. It is no surprise then that so many of our students are responding to global sociopolitical and economic forces and environmental issues with a sense of urgency, that public practices are central to their concerns, and that they are skilled in navigating emerging technologies while offering playful counterpoints to the all-pervasive influence of digital media.

Engagement beyond the studio within the university setting—where disciplinary boundaries are constantly being redefined and new areas of knowledge are emerging—creates dynamic learning structures that link the Sam Fox School to a host of other academic units of Washington University, including the George Warren Brown School of Social Work; the Department of Computer Science and Engineering; the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and the Department of American Culture Studies, to name a few. This cross-disciplinary, project-based approach to learning, coupled with access to substantive faculty-led summer programs abroad and short-term study-based travel in the US, adds yet another dimension—one that supports methodological learning so that students can acquire knowledge and training according to their own particular set of needs and interests. This open-ended structure allows student artists to move beyond the formal issues and subjective insights that typically inform studio-based practice into a variety of other contexts within the larger culture that address broader intellectual and social frameworks—such as those that involve underrepresented communities, ecological projects, or scientific research.

<sup>1</sup>Arthur C. Danto, *Unnatural Wonders: Essays from the Gap between Art and Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Naturally, with the integration of so many influences in the studio, the outcomes are robust and varied. One politically charged work, which focuses on history and the collective memory of psychological trauma, involves motion, voiced testimonies, and the appropriation of public space to activate an examination of identity and social justice. Another project involves elaborate simulations of the melting of the earth’s icebergs and polar caps, using data from science in a poetic way to press viewers into contemplating the effects of global warming. Yet another work wittily references historical masterpieces and postmodernism by representing collegiate parties as a form of magnificent ritual; and a series of sculptural works explores the reuse of materials, perhaps in gesture toward Arte Povera’s unconventional style, while mining the immediacy of sensual perception.

Bringing together these works and others for display at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, the culminating MFA exhibition is also a vital part of the working process. Here, student artists collaborate with one another and with museum staff to execute a museum-quality exhibition and also negotiate the sharing of space. In the end, it is the students themselves and their collective chemistry that are crucial to the final outcome. This opportunity offers long-term practical experience for young artists about to enter a complex world where compromise and collaboration are integral to their success.

In summary, the landscape of today’s studio-based practices is broad and nonhierarchical, reflecting a multiplicity of concepts and aesthetic values. No single medium, narrative direction, theoretical stance, or sociopolitical position takes precedent over another. Likewise, our students engage a broad spectrum of creative methodologies and intellectual frameworks, and are taught to balance “making” with the production of ideas. With thinking-as-making integral to the process, they are visually literate and digitally proficient, culturally diverse and media savvy. They are networked, integrated learners and, perhaps most significant, keenly aware of the larger, shifting global contexts in which they actively participate.

It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to launch this publication on the occasion of the 2009 MFA exhibition at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum.<sup>2</sup>

## Patricia Olynik

*Director, Graduate School of Art  
Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts  
Florence and Frank Bush Professor of Art*

<sup>2</sup>Additional work by graduating MFA candidates will be on view at Washington University’s South Campus facility.



*Meredith Malone (right), assistant curator at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, and Patricia Olynyk, director of the Graduate School of Art, conduct a visit to Anne Lindberg's painting studio in preparation for the MFA 2009 Thesis Exhibition at the Museum, May 8 to July 27, 2009.*

MFA09







In my work I explore the transformative process that occurs when opposing ideas merge. The intersection of the ideal and the actual, the spiritual and the physical, and place and space are investigated as they relate to events and people in my life. I use the transition between drafting and drawing as a visual metaphor for these concepts.

The potential of the multiple is important to my studio practice as well. This working methodology speaks to the idea of transformation. One of my prints can be a catalyst for a drawing, folded into a sculpture, cut out to form a new matrix or collaged into a painting.

My work constantly crosses over into other disciplines. I came to Washington University as a printmaker, but quickly shifted into doing installations, drawings, and sculpture. The interdisciplinary program at the Sam Fox School not only allowed me to do this but also greatly encouraged this experimentation.




Stephanie Barenz  
*Starting Point: Apt #35, 2008*  
Graphite and acrylic on panel

One of the major assets of this program is that art and architecture are part of the same school. I took the electives Urban Books and Drafting and Drawing during my first year, which are both taught by an artist and an architect. My final year I studied independently with a faculty member from the architecture program. What I have taken from these experiences has greatly informed much of my work and studio practice.

But the part of my graduate education that I am most grateful for is the community of individuals I met and worked with here. They have had the greatest influence on my work and my development as an artist. Sharing studios with forty other artists means that ideas are exchanged and realized constantly.

This environment provides numerous opportunities for collaboration, whether it is with a visiting artist or with a studio mate. I have been able to complete several collaborative projects with fellow artists at Washington University. There is also a constant stream of people that include faculty, visiting artists, critics, gallery owners, and curators flowing in and out of the facility. The possibilities to engage with these individuals are endless. I have found that through these conversations my work has changed drastically in only two years. It has prepared me to be a professional working artist and has given me the proper tools that are needed to navigate the art scene.





The edges of our great and powerful nation are unraveling. Thousands of jobs are being lost, and houses are foreclosed and left vacant, often leaving behind belongings and pets. Families are being ripped apart by devastating natural disasters, their homes and towns wiped away. The fragility of our homes, culture, and earth as a whole is becoming realized. Within my artworks, it is my intention to create a cultural wasteland, a reinvention of a collapsing society or an imagined future possibility. I am interested in conveying a state of tension: a power struggle between nature and man, people and state, war and peace, rich and poor, past and present.

While becoming more aware of corporate power, global warming, human rights, and the interworkings of government, I have reanalyzed my life and my past perspective globally and personally. During our current state of war I think about the disintegration of cultures, land, vegetation, and a global loss of respect for other human beings. I see a falling culture with tattered strings, a devalued human state with little or no regard for the environment that encapsulates us. Despite my pessimistic overtone, I like to leave room for optimism by including a subtle hint of possibility, the idea of "hanging on by a thread." I allow room to persevere, a moment of personal realization that we can't give up.

Trying to intellectualize, process, and regurgitate outrageous events is no small task. To become familiar with the present, I must reevaluate my own past and allow myself the freedom to reconstruct it. While manipulating the past to suit the present, the seams of perception begin to split open. By playfully generating phantasmagorical recreations of my memories and current surroundings, I remove its cumbersome essence. I retell a kaleidoscopic story of my existence by meshing and reorganizing past imagery into the present, creating possible futures.





Jacob Cruzen  
*The Tentacle of the Kraken*, 2008  
Carpet, Plexiglas, steel  
frame, and aircraft cord



Jacob Cruzen  
*Untitled*, 2008  
Plexiglas, protective mask,  
saddle, and steel platform



My work functions within the discursive space between marginalized epistemologies and the immediacy of sensual perception. My strategy is to engage with the language and tropes of painting by creating a wedge between painting and any residue left of its idealistic notion of transcendence. By looking at existing conventions and constructs that are reflected in the hyper-consumerist art world, my work attempts to intervene and momentarily disrupt the larger tradition of painting through a critique of global consumer capitalism.

For a week I worked as an assistant to artist Sarah Oppenheimer at the Saint Louis Art Museum. Working with her greatly influenced the way I approach the art-making process, as well as allowed me to witness the artist-museum relationship firsthand. It was a rich experience for all of us and I consider myself lucky to have helped her realize her project.





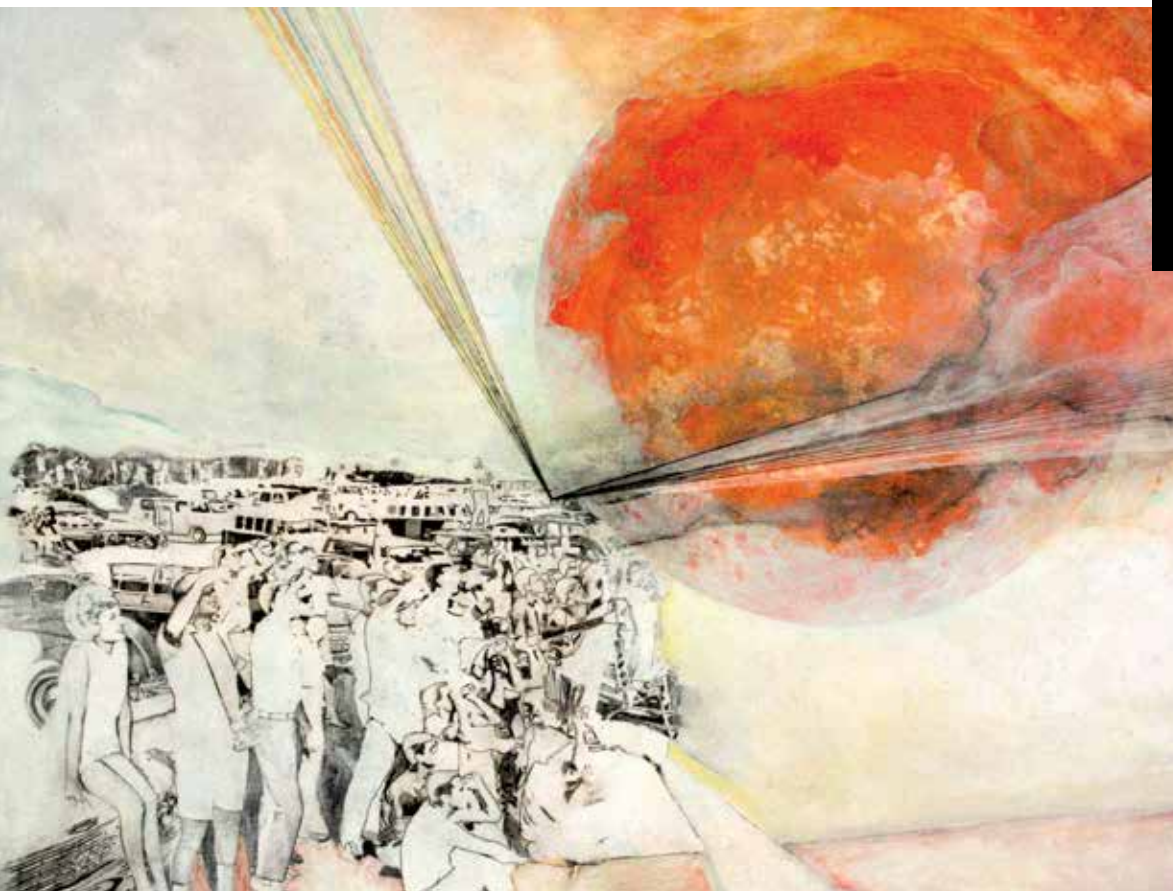
Rachel Ann Dennis  
Detail of *Channel  
Spectacle Launch*, 2008  
Mixed-media print  
and drawing



The world has become an iteration of itself. From the pictures taken at parties and promptly posted to the Internet, to the images streaming from various war zones, people and the events that happen to them have become fodder for a proverbial constant re-run. The line between media as information provider versus entertainer has become irrevocably blurred.

As an artist, I am trying to depict my experience of being an intended viewer of this modern media amphitheater. The materials I use are simple. I start with new technology and work down. From computer, to digital print, to traditional print, to drawing, I work down through technology to construct my narratives. This act of working down is my proverbial digestion of information. I become the broadcaster; news and reality television peddle out their agendas as I peddle out my agenda through my work. I depend on the aesthetics and traditions of collage, feminist art, and print to make my statement. I am not a new-media artist, but rather an artist who makes work in a new-media world. My role as a consumer, an artist, as a receiver of information is as much a part of the spectacle as the droves of people who looked up at the sky as the first man went into space.

Rachel Ann Dennis  
*Channel Spectacle  
Launch*, 2008  
Mixed-media print  
and drawing



When I decided to pursue a Masters in Fine Art, I knew that I wanted to receive that degree from a university and not simply an art school. This choice was driven by my belief that research is a fundamental part of contemporary art-making. Happily, Washington University, specifically, the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts, recognizes this important interplay between rigorous intellectual pursuit and committed artistic practice.



“ The identity of the material, as well as myself, is something that begins to change as our interaction takes place. ”



In the moment of engagement between viewers and my work lies the instant in which it comes to its complete fulfillment. My work's existence and ability to perform its intellectual task is not dependent upon people, but rather it facilitates the interface that is occurring between them. I look at, and investigate, social situations and instances in which people look to create their own specific individual identity through repetitive actions.

In relation to this, I've become interested in the difficulty and perplexity that exists for someone to retain this sense of self-identity that has been formed, while simultaneously trying to truly belong to a collective group. This pursuit to maintain a sense of one's self, while trying to conform to a collective, is a main component not only of my studio practice but also in my life. The identity of the material, as well as myself, is something that begins to change as our interaction takes place. The result of the latter is the unification of body and matter in the form of my work.





As an artist and an individual, I am in constant conversation with the values transposed through multiculturalism. I seek to challenge notions of sameness, unity, and political correctness with pieces that affirm a sense of community for some, while paradoxically alienating others.

Major influxes in international travel, technological advances, immigration, adoption, and intermarriage are causing the borders and boundaries between countries to merge together at an increasingly rapid pace. The imagined spaces of individual cultures are no longer autonomous.



MAYA ESCOBAR

The night of the 2008 presidential elections, Carianne Noga and I initiated a public art piece that involved collecting the hopes of the University City community. After getting permission from the city, we installed our piece on a large lattice sculpture outside the post office. Word spread quickly of our project, and we were soon featured in a full-page spread in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Therefore it is with a conscious move that I, and many colleagues and contemporaries, unapologetically go forward, breaking through traditional conceptions of art and artistic practice. No longer tied down to medium-specific practices, we produce work derivative of a multitude of discourses. The works that we produce, however, are distinct from those in the fields that our work represents. We are concerned with the past, but we will not allow the past to solely delineate the future. We hope to form a new definition of artistic practice that will include our constantly shifting environment.

To this end, during the second semester of the program, myself and my frequent collaborator and partner in crime, Carianne Noga (also an MFA candidate), partook in the symbolic gesture of unifying our respective studio spaces—to form a shared space, which we declared property of the entire graduate program. We named this space a “wustlworkshop.” Our goal was to foster an environment that would promote creativity, interdisciplinary collaborations, and research initiatives, and build foundations for community engagement. We hoped that by starting the conversation with what we were familiar with we might be able to offer something of interest to students working in other disciplines.





My work is an investigation of how humans regard their cultural and natural environments through the framework of domestic dwelling.

Whether constructing an image or an object, the importance for me lies in creating pieces that juxtapose our perceptions of both the built environment and the landscape. Drawing from influences that include architecture, garden design, interior décor, and Japanese prints and painting, the work is meant to explore the implications of spatial perception and the emotional responses that the visual intersection of these environments can elicit.

I liken my process to that of gardening. Cultivating materials, I vacillate between the poles of systematically creating singular images and then intuitively composing, arranging, and editing the constructions to desired effect.



Meredith Foster  
*All of the Horizons*, 2009  
Cut paper, polyester film,  
wood, and fluorescent lighting

Prior to my enrollment at Washington University, my studio experience was focused almost entirely on production—the act of making—and though this is still an essential part, my ability to proficiently conceptualize where the work is and how it shall evolve has increased.





American society—which still tends toward puritan values—finds nudity, prostitution, polyamory, BDSM, and (shockingly) homosexuality to be deviance, among many other practices. My work addresses these differences from the norm in the context of the brain: where, exactly, does a polyamorous person's physiology differ from that of a similar monogamous person?

My explorations surface as biomorphic shapes inspired by the brain and other sexually activated body systems. My materials include fabrics, foam, branches, PVC, and undergarments—shunning individual identity in a mobile visual cacophony. Veins and bumps cover shiny surfaces. Androgynous partial nudity is covered by skin-like creations. Human silhouettes are obscured or lost entirely. Human components are forced into discomfort, often involving the fetishes they discuss. Strange internal shapes manifest from the head down the body, as brain function does.

During my time at the program, I had the incredible honor of meeting one of my deepest inspirations, Judy Pfaff. Her amazing visit to my studio encouraged me to push my work further into the realms of viewer discomfort. I also had the unique opportunity to provide a collection as well as several video pieces for St. Louis Fashion Week. There I was exposed to the inner workings of the fashion world: designers, editors, photographers, models, press, technical crew, and all other staff imperative for the making of a successful performance. This venue allowed me to branch my work into the realm of fashion design and bridge the gap between performance art and couture fashion. It paved the way for many other shows and networking possibilities that have placed my work and my career where they are today.



Gina Grafos  
143 City Park Ave.  
New Orleans, LA 70119, 2008  
Pigmented ink on  
archival paper



Gina Grafos  
1725 Saint Roch Ave.  
New Orleans, LA 70117, 2008  
Pigmented ink on  
archival paper



I find my environment filled with reminders and representations of my altered faith in the form of religious statuary. These figures become an index of passing faith. I am so affected by these pieces of public devotional art that I am compelled to document their placement within the landscape. I intend for my photographs to question the veracity of such placement, and to highlight the juxtaposition of these archaic symbols with our contemporary, urban environment. I am also interested in the spectator's set of codes and how to reorient these codes in the orientation of my work. Whether I am tiptoeing around cemeteries with my camera, or in front of technology, I don't consider myself solely a studio-based artist. Still, the studio has provided a vital element to my work.

Through community, critique, and camaraderie, my practice will be forever changed. I am blessed with problem-solving mentors, fresh technology, and travel opportunities. My trip to Berlin proved to me what possibilities lie in being an artist. Sarah Oppenheimer, our visiting Freund Fellow, changed the coordinates of my perspective. In the end, I will only realize what I have gained when I move on from the program. My experience at Washington University has enriched my life as an artist and as a person.



Stephen Hoskins  
*Maureen*, 2008  
Oil on panel



Stephen Hoskins  
*Meredith*, 2008  
Gouache and color  
pencil on paper



As a painter I face the challenge of composing still images to represent multifaceted experience; the studio is a place where I can reconstruct segmented personal experience into broader narratives. My process is founded on the inability to fully understand others and intends to engage the viewer in reflection upon the individual through the painting's construction. In order to have a variety of options to develop my work, I tend to select information from multiple sources, such as photographs, memories, and sketches. Much of my process is based upon a tacit knowledge that I learn from doing and failing.

In addition to the development of my work, my teaching assistantships at Washington University reaffirmed my desire to continue teaching beyond graduate school. Through a hands-on approach, as well the opportunity to observe and work with ambitious faculty, I feel confident that I have the groundwork to pursue a career in teaching fine arts. Teaching has also provided an opportunity in challenging my students to reflect upon not only the technical and conceptual choices they have made in their work, but also the intentionality of those choices.



My colleagues are also an indispensable resource. Their insights strengthen both my studio practice and investigation into my body of work. The open graduate studio environment at Washington University has fostered a creative dialogue among students of different mediums, which further enhanced the development of all of our works across disciplines.



“The defacing of surfaces is equal to the mark in a drawing that has been repeatedly erased and drawn over again.”



I am interested in merging “art” and “life.” In accumulating a roster of found materials, I am able to choose from a wide vocabulary to address human interactions and human detritus. When things are lost or left behind I pick them up. Process art and Arte Povera are formative influences. An attention to labor, repetitive action, and activities such as work and play trickle into the studio. My work displays the memory of physical activity. The defacing of surfaces is equal to the mark in a drawing that has been repeatedly erased and drawn over again. I respond to variables in the studio and create new formal relationships to agree on and contest.

While here at Washington University, the constant flow of visiting artists has been a great resource. People from a wide range of backgrounds have come to the campus to offer invaluable experiences. The visiting artists and speakers have been the easiest resource to tap into in the Sam Fox School. The graduate program has created a tight community. The diverse faculty creates an experience that is anything but formulaic. I have spent countless hours in the Art and Architecture Library. Other non-studio classes I have taken have been equally important in my success as a student at the University.

I quickly realized how close-knit the art community is after moving to St. Louis. Washington University is only one component of that community. St. Louis is a city that has not become so overgrown that the chances of beginning a career as a working artist seem impossible. The Midwest in general has the feeling that, although it is not New York or Los Angeles, it has the capacity to pave a unique identity of its own. I have gained a lot of confidence in myself from the spirit of going to smaller galleries on Cherokee Street or seeing a lot of the undergraduates put together shows. I have had several opportunities to assist working artists either at Washington University, at Island Press, or at the Contemporary Art Museum. My peers have been champions and competitors. We all have different voices. Even working in such proximity, our work remains distinct from one another.







Hye Young Kim  
*Conversation Game*, 2008  
 Paper cup sculpture, pipes, TV,  
 video player, and wireless cam


The Berlin program inspired me to become a professional artist. In Berlin, we visited many studios of professional artists with Patricia Olynyk, who is director of the graduate program, and Sabine Eckmann, who is director and chief curator at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum. Through Sabine Eckmann, we could meet contemporary German artists and deeply discuss the new art scene in Berlin.

The MFA program at Washington University focuses on "non-specific media" and "interdisciplinary study" as the new movements in the contemporary art world; we become not only painters, sculptors, and printmakers, but also professional and contemporary artists. In undergraduate school, I usually did paintings and drawings, but in my first year of this program I did blueprints, silkscreen, blacksmithing, and installation. I learned blueprints from photography graduate students, got advice about silkscreen from printmaking professors, learned blacksmithing in class, and developed installations with visiting artists. Through various media explorations in the first year, I developed yarn paintings conceptually and technically.



As for my creative philosophy, there is no certain boundary between dream and reality; questioning the boundary gives a moment to awaken. I imagine that if a piece of yarn from my sweater follows me, I can always be sure of where I was. A ball of yarn is like a life. If the length of yarn is the same as that of a life, unraveled yarn shows the time which I have lived, and the yarn left over shows the time which I have yet to live. In the MFA show, I will show yarn paintings which present my physical and psychological traces in an abstract space to record each moment of my life. I want to ensure my existence in this awakening moment.






Throughout the history of art, still life painting's historical and intellectual trajectory often resides within the contemplation of mortality. Jennifer Higgie offers that nothing is permanent besides this image of impermanence, an image of death that prompts a re-examining of life. Thus objects in still life paintings become metaphors for the body and for time. Humans tend to project the image of the body onto the things with which we come into contact; we anthropomorphize both images and objects and relate what we see to our physical selves. And aptly so, the body is the house, and with it we experience being through the fabulous arabesque of nerves in the brain receiving input through those delicate tools, the senses. By seeing the body in another way, there is enough detachment to safely contemplate its grandeur.

My work, by referencing the body through represented personal objects that act as a barrier to the world "out there," calls attention to the world of the interior, the self. This is where the metaphorical function of the work resides. Highlighting the relationship between the physical and the ephemeral, self and community, I draw connections to contemporary society, as today the strength of our homes no longer resides in their foundation.

The community here has been very positive. The mentors I have in the graduate program are an amazing resource to my artistic growth. I always felt as though I had access to guidance when it was needed. Also, I could not have asked for a more committed, helpful, and fun peer group who I am sure will be lifelong contacts. There were also very diverse voices between the graduate faculty, our graduate director, and the multitude of visiting artists who spoke with us in individual critiques. In the outside community there is a vibrant art scene as well. There have been great shows at the Contemporary Art Museum like Maya Lin and the Great Rivers Biennial, and a good range of other galleries all over St. Louis. We also had the opportunity to exhibit work at Art St. Louis and the Des Lee Gallery downtown.





My approach toward artwork has been evolving for years, and it has become increasingly apparent that collaborations not only influence the way I work, but also the way I think about art and life in a broader sense. My collaborations consist of more than the artwork produced; they serve as a type of metaphor for means of coexistence.

My work could also be seen as interventions into established dogmas in the world of contemporary American society, as well as the world of contemporary art establishments. Out of this discourse I want to remove triviality and to be simple and bold. I also want to address the bizarre occurrences between artists and their work in relation to the influence that power structures of governments impose upon creative and intellectual integrity through education, private foundations, museums, galleries, art publications, and magazines, just to name a few.

I have been addressing this subject matter by utilizing traditional and nontraditional printmaking techniques on paper. At the same time I am interested in presenting my artwork to a wider audience, to give them chance to have the works that otherwise they wouldn't be able to own. This brought me to the point where I decided to distribute work in the form of a small xeroxed book, available for free at openings of my exhibitions. I discovered that as an alternative to the traditional way of printing of pronto plates, xeroxing the pronto plates resulted in inexpensive, highly contrasted images with interesting gray tones throughout.



My prints carry an implied narrative of displacement and a quest to make one's journey one's home. I am interested in depicting a layered world where wonder and sadness do not cancel each other out, where the work can read with the rhythm of poetry—at once still and full of wanderlust. My production strategy is in the making—I thrive amidst the sensorial cues that fill my studio: sounds crackling through the boom box, the smell of fresh ink, and the sight of paper remnants piled for the future. The core of my studio practice is as a print and book artist, though my work extends to public art and installation.

The resources available to me at Washington University continue to unfold. Seeing first-hand the artist books of Enrique Chagoya and Martin Puryear in the Olin Library Special Collections, having Judy Pfaff in my studio thanks to the Visiting Artist Lecture Series, and meeting Willie Cole through the *On the Margins* exhibition at the Kemper Art Museum are only a few examples of recent encounters with great artists that have made a lasting impact on my work. Facilities such as the large etching press and letterpress studio have greatly shaped my artistic direction, though it is the faculty and my peers that will continue to challenge and inspire my work in the future.



I have an insatiable desire for institutional critique. I also like to watch The Ellen DeGeneres Show. Undoubtedly, my interest in the critique of institution stems from my own personal history of triumphantly living outside of the norm. Now, as an artist I'm in the position to communicate freely whatever I choose—or am I? Who decides?

I play appropriated YouTube footage and stolen MySpace photos on LCD screens. I take frames off the walls, and insert blackness into continuity. I leave labels blank. My process includes a careful evaluation of what I do not believe is effective practice within the realms of making, displaying, and criticizing works of art. I engage in the world outside of the museum wholeheartedly, and bring pieces of it into the art institution honestly.

I draw your attention to a question art aficionados proudly spurn: What is art? Just how damaging is the answer?

The questions I ask in my work are derived directly from my experience as a graduate student in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. Here, I have learned immeasurable and happy lessons about myself and truly participated in the larger world institution of art. I've eaten with, driven with, listened to, and been taught by artists from around the world. I've examined the lives and environments of artists in their practices, not just in St. Louis, but also in the thriving metropolis of Los Angeles. I've even met and questioned candidly some of my own artist and critic heroes. Having had these experiences, working relentlessly beside my friends in the studio, I can faithfully and critically examine the institution of art, because the Sam Fox School has truly made me a part of it.

“As an artist I'm in the position to communicate freely whatever I choose—or am I? Who decides?”

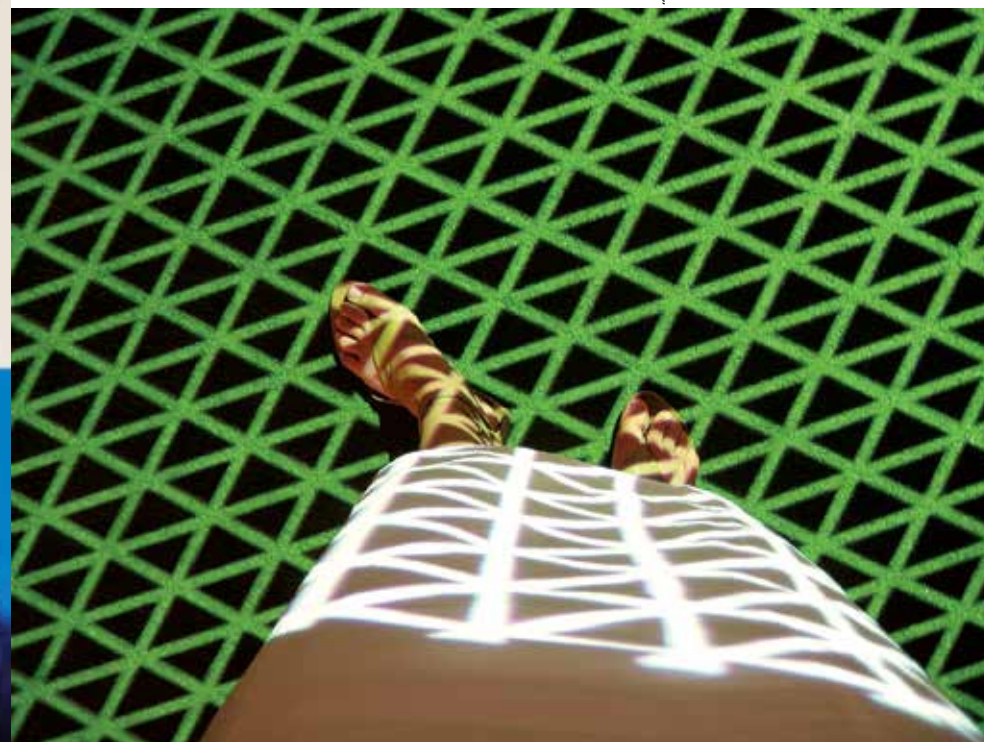




The term “discrete code” refers to a method of coding in which the spaces between pieces of information are rendered invisible simply because of their position between the more important information. In everyday life I see these neglected spaces, these intercharacter gaps, between words, the blank backs of photographs, the pauses in conversation, and within the very concept of “personal space.”

In most of my work, I have been particularly interested in what can be generally called a divided sense of self, as well as those conditions that effect a fractured existence.

Through a diverse range of media, I explore how our “man-made” environments shape our development, growth, and experiences, and the various ways our societies’ impose rational aesthetics on our selves and our bodies. The subject matter I am inspired by often-times will be completely invisible in the final product, as I am not attempting to depict any *thing*; rather, I am making attempts to connect several disparate points, separate from the *thing* and separate from each other. In drawing the various conceptual, immaterial connections, I am working toward what could be described as a philosophically motivated *psychogeometricization* of space.



While I was in Berlin the summer of 2008 with a group of fellow MFA students and a few faculty members, I really began to recognize my interest in the interstitial material that often goes unnoticed. In fact, it determines us and our experiences, and necessarily so. In Berlin I was confronted with the city’s many layers of history as it has moved through the ages, with some struggle, seeking a unified identity. My colleague and dearest friend, Maya Escobar, and I were awarded one of the Sam Fox Graduate Student Travel Grants for our jointly produced proposal to collect recorded media for Maya’s project “Berlin’s Eruv—The Changing Face of Jewish Identity as Delineated through Social Spaces.” Last February we returned to Berlin, where we were able to conduct several interviews for this project.

Carianne Noga  
“Do you see what I see?”, 2008  
Digital video projection  
Photography: Kelda Martensen



Joel Parker  
*Exile*, 2008  
Oil on canvas



Joel Parker  
*Zack as Bacchus*, 2008  
Oil on canvas



The idea for my paintings about college extracurricular activities came from my experience of viewing keg parties on my friends' Facebook accounts. Here I investigated my peers' obsessive documentation of their weekend exploits. The importance of these activities is acknowledged through the sheer volume of images. Yet little consideration is given to aesthetics, only an attempt to show happiness, hipness, and community. I seek to adorn, clarify, and venerate these activities by creating paintings that take into consideration the activities' aesthetic qualities.

I use nude figures to show the ritualistic nature of the activities, to reflect the sexuality that underlies many of these events, and to reveal the deep-seated desire for community and joy found within the participants. Nudity also removes their individuality, creating a separation from specificity that allows them to stand in for the whole. Lastly, nudity allows me to converse with the history of painting in a symbolic and visually interesting manner.



JOEL PARKER

The best thing I can say about my experience here as a graduate student is that my peer group and relationship to my professors are absolutely amazing. This is exactly the type of instruction that I was looking for when I applied to Washington University. I am very thankful that this remains a studio-intensive program, with professors who are deeply interested in cultivating artistic facilities in each student. I have seen tremendous growth in my own abilities as a painter. This was the result of lots of time spent in the studio and guided individual instruction from professors Jamie Adams and John Sarra. These two men are amazing teachers—they understand painting in its contemporary context, but are very knowledgeable of traditional painting practices. In coming to graduate school from a very small art department, I was searching for deep friendships with committed fellow artists, and that is exactly what I found.





My impetus is ecological concern and interest in human interaction with land. This interaction is two-sided: we both alter and are altered by the land. As places change, our memories waver and shift, leaving only traces of lost environments.

Just as memory builds in layers, I work in layers, physically and metaphorically. Geologic strata and layers of human anatomy help me envision the planet as organism. Like computer mapping systems (GIS) use layers of information to create complex interactive map images, I compile information that burrows into my work. I build images through accumulation of materials including paper, photographs, maps, melting ice, and growing plants. Paper stacks up to become sculptural, photographs form videos, ice leaves waterlines, as if flood and drought had their way with the work.



Rebecca C. Potts  
Melt 1, 2009  
Ice train water, acrylic, dye, and dirt on paper

My ideas take precedence in informing my process and media, making my practice multidisciplinary, crossing from printmaking into sculpture, video, and installation. I put much of my work through a cyclic process of which I am not the only part. I turn the work over to ice, plants, water, or other natural processes to remove my hand and forfeit some control. This process speaks to natural cycles of seasons and tides, while also reflecting the dynamic interaction of human and natural forces in the world. There is seduction in repetition and value in subtle poetic renderings of political problems.

The professors have been my greatest resource in the graduate program. They inspire and set high standards with their work while remaining very accessible. My committee has asked all the tough questions that push me to be more thoughtful about concepts and aesthetics, have provided incredible technical knowledge, and have encouraged me to trust my instincts and to make art the way I love to make it.

Showing in a major museum at the end of the MFA is exciting and the process prepares us for future museum shows. It has been nice having the Kemper on campus and being given opportunities to meet with artists showing there. The *On the Margins* show and accompanying panel and visits with Willie Dougherty gave examples of current political work and increased my interest in video.

I feel lucky to be part of this exceptional class of artists. The informal critiques with peers have been helpful and encouraging. We also met several of the gallerists and curators in St. Louis, who offered advice and were even willing to do studio visits. Another sort of peer group who has imparted insight and the perfect words to explain our work is MFA writing students. This connection speaks to the benefits of being situated within a large university. I've also been able to talk with professors in the Earth & Planetary Sciences departments and attend several events related to climate change and mapping.



“My images are meant to be seen as a whole which is greater than the sum of the parts.”



When photographing, I am actively aware of only the present. The framework of the camera does not allow me to move beyond the “now.” But somewhere in my subconscious I am continually referencing the past and the future. But it is not until looking at a group of images that I am aware of what I was seeing.

My images are meant to be seen as a whole which is greater than the sum of the parts. They develop a narrative in regards to how they are read, and I give the viewer the responsibility of finding such. Having the ability to choose the viewing order is something viewers possess, whether they are aware of it or not.

My mode of operation grows from a desire to be part of the world. As the world changes, so does my thinking. New ideas surface from progressing the work alongside my personal self.

Being at an institution such as Washington University gave me several opportunities to explore new ways of thinking about art-making. The most important resource for me was being surrounded by people approaching creative work from multiple angles. Coming from a departmentalized program, I was thoroughly surprised at how productive it was to have input from those outside of photography. Everyone that I came in contact with had a new perspective on my work, and we became engaged in discourse that led to the reevaluation of my work. Seeing your own work with fresh eyes is liberating.

Outside of the university, St. Louis offers many opportunities for success. Looking to the local art community gives you the chance to exhibit, be involved in community projects, and enjoy a social life (something that can easily be overlooked). Many possibilities are available and the level of involvement is up to the individual.





My studio practice is multifaceted and chaotic at times. My artwork always begins with a concept or idea. Once I have these ideas that I am interested in conveying visually, I begin making 2-D and 3-D rough drafts. I generate a multitude of pieces in a variety of media—for example, photographs, sculptures, sketches, etc. From these initial pieces I determine which ones best articulate my concept. While I am creating art I am also constantly researching and developing my concept. I conduct individual and group critiques of my work with my mentors, instructors, and peers to find out if my work is actually conveying my intended idea. All of these above-mentioned exercises happen simultaneously. I envelop myself in my work, and I am continuously picking up inspiration from everything that I come into contact with in daily life.

The intensive, in-residence graduate program has increased my ability to create visual art and articulate my ideas exponentially. My mentors—Richard Krueger, Jennifer Colten Schmidt, and Stan Strembecki—have challenged me and pushed me (sometimes kicking and screaming) through this program. I am eternally grateful for the advice and wisdom that they have bestowed upon me. My graduate peers have also profoundly affected and influenced my artwork and myself personally. I have developed lifelong professional relationships as well as magnificent camaraderie.



Michael Kenneth Smith  
*Immersion #1*, 2008  
Inflated construction  
plastic, steel, and wood



As a kinetic sculptor, I manipulate and choreograph basic construction materials and mechanical devices into compositions that physically demonstrate various scientific principles. Pneumatic technology is abstract in nature and difficult to work with. The invisibility of air demands a flexible working method to address and solve the constant problems that get in the way of the visual outcome I hope to achieve. These sculptures are an attempt to approach the contemporary landscape of architectural sculpture.

I have created a body of work that has a strong conceptual foundation in the fields of science and architecture. I came to Washington University with a deep understanding of how to build things, and with an extensive resume in blacksmithing, metal fabrication, and construction. It was important for me to incorporate this knowledge of *how* to construct a work of sculpture into an intense focus that helped understand *why* I was building them. With the constant interaction that I have had with all three of my committee members, my work has gained enormous momentum. I have been pushed to ask myself, *why?* and answer the important questions that one must face when creating a complex work of sculpture. Understanding the “*why*” has been a challenge, to say the least, but due to this enhanced method of investigation, the work and the process behind its making has evolved tremendously in such a short amount of time.

But by far, the greatest influence on my work has been the daily conversations and critiques that I have encountered with my fellow grad students at Washington University. The student body is truly a diverse and motivated band, showing up everyday with every intention to excel at pushing the envelope on what we can accomplish within the competitive atmosphere of the art world at large. The Lewis Center is our home base and a valuable, competent resource facility. Since the graduate program is separated from the main campus, this affords each student a private studio and a warm, personal environment.

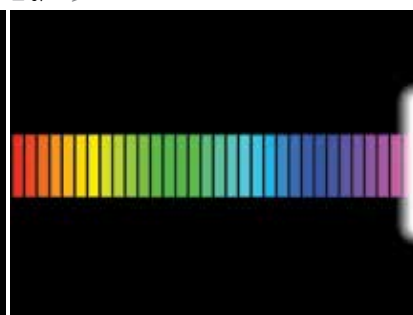




Dan Solberg  
*Stills from Glowers*, 2008  
 Video animation (4 mins.)



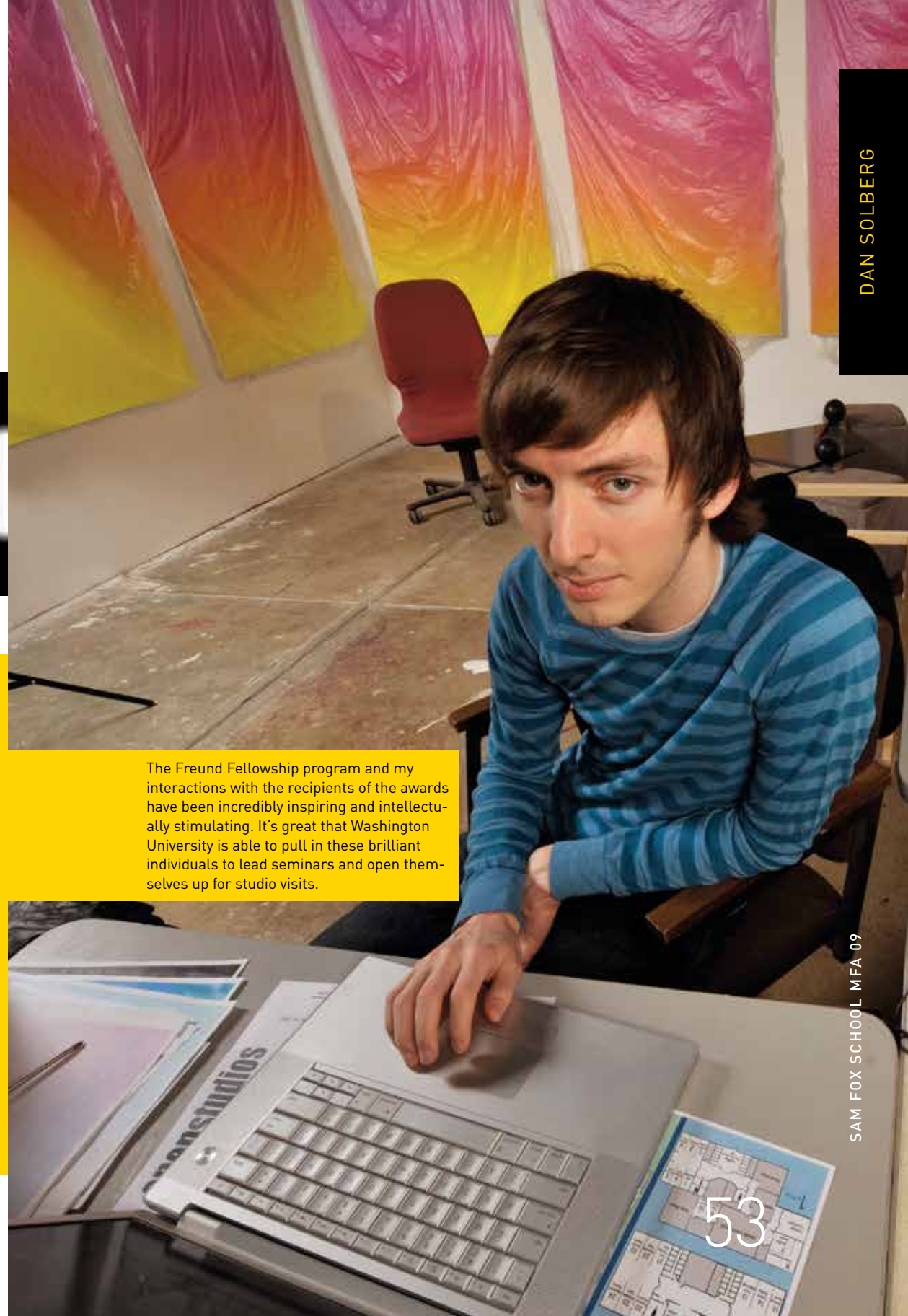
Dan Solberg  
*Still from Color Bars*, 2008  
 1/2 of a 2-channel  
 video animation



My current work is a struggle with subjectivity. It's my intention to use the language of technology to examine the ever-evolving social realities that generate one's understanding of the world. New inventions are created to fulfill specific purposes. I think it's worth asking how these inventions change our perceptions. What would happen if they were taken beyond their realm of purpose or pushed to the brink of their ability? Essentially, I'm making work about transitioning into using these new inventions. What is considered obsolete and what is being overlooked?

Transitions are a consistent visual element in my work—appearing as Photoshop gradients, color differentiations in weather radar patterns, or as a song fading into another in a sound component in a video. Being able to track the rate of change brings us back to a sense of objectivity since, depending on the process at hand, computers often allow for a numeric tracking of this ratio. However, it's important to me that these elements combine to create a rewarding aesthetic experience.

As far as the program goes, the biggest impact on my work was the Berlin trip. Hearing from other artists working there was liberating. The freedom that some of them enjoyed in terms of what form their art takes from one piece to another was quite refreshing and opened my mind up to working more from instinct and less from trying to fit every new piece in with what came before. I was never a media-specific artist, but I think those talks made me feel more comfortable with that position in the face of institutional traditions. Berlin also allowed for a cultural exploration that is totally unique to that city.



The Freund Fellowship program and my interactions with the recipients of the awards have been incredibly inspiring and intellectually stimulating. It's great that Washington University is able to pull in these brilliant individuals to lead seminars and open themselves up for studio visits.





BELOW  
Natalie Toney  
*Host*, 2008  
Mixed media on glass

RIGHT  
Natalie Toney  
*Veteran's Day Parade, St. Louis  
MO, 11/8/2008*, still from the  
documentary *PTISPEACE*, 2009  
Video



Utilizing methods of performance, installation, video and sound design gives the chance to work in multiple situations and with various populations. Working with groups who possess a common bond, or in conditions that produce a similar physiological response, is central to the symbiosis of most of my pieces. Collaboration with others in visual and performing arts, multimedia, film, engineering, psychology, social service, and the medical field is integral to creating an environment for physical, psychological, and spiritual growth.

The multidisciplinary centered graduate program within the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts has been invaluable in terms of artistic and academic growth. The allowance to pursue an array of classes while in studio practice contributed to a strong theoretical foundation, informing the work in a manner that otherwise may have not been discovered. The ongoing critical feedback shared by visiting artists and curators, coupled with knowledge gained from attending lectures, has propelled and shaped my work. Studying award-winning filmmakers in conjunction with the "1000 Arches" project for the Eero Saarinen exhibit at the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum—and having the opportunity to work with Christ Prince of Peace seventh graders at the same time—has been a most rewarding experience.

“As an artist, I feel a personal obligation to give back to the men and women who have risked or lost their lives in military conflict. My work offers a voice to veterans, providing insight to the community.”



Having the occasion to be a teaching assistant in areas that range from 3-D design to fashion design, as well as other courses, has given me the chance to learn a wide breadth of methods preparing to instruct at university level. Teaching in multiple areas also provides an opportunity to become familiar with the larger student body and faculty, getting a chance for a new perspective.





We enter the world through the front door of a home that is already decorated upon our arrival, with rooms designated, pictures framed, oven cooking, table set. We take in the sights, sounds and smells of our surroundings as facts, as essential truths of the world because they add up to the total sum of our reality. It is this home that orientates us, that directs us in a certain way, simply through its existence. Other possibilities are foreclosed because they are beyond our reach, outside the structures that house us. But what happens when these architectures fail to fit our bodies, and instead create a profound disorientation within us? Do we simply let our bodies be shaped until we fit? Can we ever really feel "at home" in such spaces?

These questions arise from my particular interest in the queer experience, to which this feeling of disorientation is central. Through my work I wish to explore how the queer body might exist within and emerge from these ordered spaces to articulate some other kind of architecture, perhaps one that is more porous and malleable, open to outside influences and future possibilities.



Glenn Tramantano  
*Untitled*, 2008  
Acrylic, tempera, litho ink,  
thread, acetate, and wood



To that end I attempt to play within the conventional frameworks given to us, both as an acknowledgment of an historical strategy of the queer movement, and as a way to understand and question the contemporary struggle for assimilation and integration that is taking place within this movement today. Through the language of interior design, of decoration, material, color, patterning, and interior / exterior divisions, I look at ways in which layering, camouflaging, and bodies themselves might interrupt these formal elements to reveal the artificiality of such constructions and destabilize the foundation upon which they are built.





It is becoming increasingly evident that fashion holds a place in the art world today. A fashion program at the graduate level was nonexistent at the time of my application to Washington University, but I was really impressed with the interdisciplinary program offered by the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. The faculty worked together to create a specialized program where I could work with teachers from both the undergraduate and graduate programs. Although I am the only graduate student focusing on fashion design, I have had the privilege of working with other MFA candidates as well as fashion design majors in the undergraduate program. There is no other school that could offer such a fabulous experience. It has been challenging at times to narrow down my area of research, but also very liberating to have the ability to create the parameters of this fashion graduate program. The Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts exceeded my expectations.

The in-residence studio program is one of the top reasons I became so interested in the Sam Fox School. I knew coming into the program that I would be the first (and probably the only) MFA candidate focusing on fashion design, but I knew that it was crucial to be around other artists working in different mediums. My work is executed primarily in the form of research, so understanding what is happening in the art world is very important to my process. Although many people do not see the relevance of fashion in the art world or vice versa, it is very obvious to me that they both greatly influence each other. I am working on creating a Fashion Research Library at the school for my body of work this year. The community at the school has been so helpful during this process simply because we are all working toward similar goals, including the advancement of the graduate program. St. Louis has been referred to as a "big small town," which I now know is a wonderful thing for artists and designers alike. We live in a very accessible city, but are also privileged to be a part of a larger art scene that one would not find in other small towns.





The modern artist acts as a facilitator for understanding, as a diplomat of the misunderstood. The interdisciplinary nature of contemporary art-making extends deep within other fields. From scientific to social, to political, the spectrum of art has the capability to penetrate all things. There is strength of idea to be gained through collaboration. A desire by many for a massive sea change is apparent, and the artist plays a vital role in this transformation. The moment is upon the world to consider creative solutions to long-standing problems. Humanity needs to be shaken into the open reception of a new creative thought process.

In my work I endeavor to promote interest and bridge discrepancies in relevant current issues. I have transitioned from firm roots in a craft tradition with an emphasis on making to an incorporation of the handmade into a contemporary conceptual framework. As with any work of this nature, there exists the continual struggle to inform but not condescend. Work that is overly accessible is discounted immediately, as is work that is too amorphous. It is the artist's role to tread this fine line.

“A viewer may be momentarily separated from the known through surprise, curiosity, disruption, and astonishment.”

Through actual and implied interaction, my sculptures create a scenario in which the viewer is removed from the status quo. An unfamiliar interaction has the power to move a participant from the comfort of the understood to a place of curiosity. By taking part in that which is not yet intellectually owned, there is an opening created for new consideration. A viewer may be momentarily separated from the known through surprise, curiosity, disruption, and astonishment. In this instant there is the solvent necessary to dissolve the fabric of existing trends of habituation, and begin thought anew. These steps are essential in a time of transition. This is a transition from a time of stagnant adherence to the status quo to a time of practical interdisciplinary creative thought. Art has the power to usher in this new era.





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# SAM FOX SCHOOL

## SAM FOX SCHOOL OF DESIGN & VISUAL ARTS

COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE	GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE & URBAN DESIGN	COLLEGE OF ART	GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ART	MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM
DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY		KRANZBERG ART & ARCHITECTURE LIBRARY		

The creative terrain of our contemporary world demands a new educational paradigm. That model is the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University, where Art, Architecture, and the Museum are united in the development of graduate programs that promote interdisciplinary practices. These programs explore the connections between diverse forms of making and multiple artistic media; encourage the dynamic interaction between these forms; and advance the synthesis between creative fields, research, and academic inquiry. Our students work with a nationally recognized faculty distinguished by strength in their primary disciplines and committed to interdisciplinary dialogue and scholarship.

We are an active community of architects, artists, designers, scholars, and curators who recognize that visual arts and design play significant roles in inspiring solutions to social, cultural, and environmental challenges. As a collaborative project between the Graduate School of Art and the Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, both part of the Sam Fox School, this publication presents 27 artists whose creative work thoughtfully confronts the challenges and optimistically engages the possibilities of our world.

MFA 2009 Thesis Exhibition  
May 8–July 27, 2009  
Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum

MILDRED LANE KEMPER ART MUSEUM





BARENZ	BENDEL	CRUZEN	DENNIS	EATON	ESCOBAR	FOSTER	GEHRIS	GRAFOS
HOSKINS	JONES	KIM	LINDBERG	MARIC	MARTENSEN	MILLSPAUGH	NOGA	PARKER
POTTS	RANDOL	RICKLES	SMITH	SOLBERG	TONEY	TRAMANTANO	TROUT	WALLACE